

2/8/2024

Dear Chair Her and Esteemed Members of LCPR,

I am writing today to ask the LCPR to reduce Tier II pension penalties to 3% increments for Tier II TRA members to move the dial towards fairness between MN Tier I and Tier II members, to create equity between Minnesota's educator pension system and surrounding states, and to prioritize continued excellence for Minnesota schools via high quality teacher retention and incentivization. I am certain you have been inundated with testimony referencing TRA's cherry-picked data comparing Minnesota Tier II educator pensions to the pensions of educators from different states, so I will only briefly address the misinformation you've been given then conclude with the importance of maintaining the rigor of Minnesota schools.

As a high school biology teacher who prioritizes the critical importance of analyzing data for accuracy in a world filled with misinformation, I implore you to do the same. Unless the source is primary (meaning the investigation methods are provided), further digging is necessary. The information given to you by TRA comparing "average" High 5 salaries was not from a primary source, nor were links to the primary sources provided. Further, the truth of the matter as you now know is that the data was blatantly inaccurate. The average High 5 salary comparisons included: 1) undocumented source data; 2) salaries of people retiring or leaving TRA at all stages of their career, 3) Minnesota educators in multiple tiers who received vastly different pension benefits; and 4) salaries of non-educator pension members from other states. In order to make informed decisions, we must have accurate information. From TRA, the LCPR received misleading data at best and patently false data at worst. TRA can no longer be trusted as a source for accurate information. Please carry this knowledge forward as you engage with them.

It's no surprise that high salaries and high benefits attract the highest quality candidates for job openings. As a child of teachers, who is the sister of a teacher, who is married to a teacher, I understand that being a teacher is a calling. But I also understand that walking out a calling this important doesn't have to and shouldn't come at the expensive of fair and equitable compensation that includes pension security. I'll be the first to admit that I knew my salary would be lower than my business counterparts' salaries with the same experience (currently, MA + 60). I chose to become a teacher anyway. What I didn't know is how different my retirement would be from my parents' and some of the Tier I colleagues I work beside. Had I known, the truth is I most likely would have chosen a different career path because I value stability.

- But, my, how my life and the lives of over 4,000 Minnesota students who are now Minnesota doctors, therapists, artists, business people, and more would be different. -

And this is my reason for alarm: when you devalue the state's education workforce, you devalue the state's children. And when educators feel devalued, fewer and less qualified teacher candidates choose to enter the profession and more of the highly qualified members choose to leave. It's that simple. Therefore, **choosing to reform Tier II pensions and continuing to prioritize high salaries for Minnesota teachers isn't about greed, it's about need.** Do we value our children – Minnesota's future citizens – above all else or do we not? If so, I think we know what needs to be done despite the current constraints.

As a teacher, I fully understand tight budgets. And, as a teacher, I also know firsthand how, day after day, year after year, Minnesota teachers creatively go above and beyond, putting personal and monetary *greed above need* in prioritizing the most important people in our society: Minnesota's kids.

I urge you: PLEASE put value back in Minnesota's Tier II workforce by prioritizing and implementing meaningful, equitable, high-quality Tier II pension reform as your top priority. It's not only what Minnesota and her children need, it's what they deserve.

Thank you for your time,



Stacy Bartlett